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ABSTRACT

The principal discussion in this paper focuses on the student, teacher, administrator, and community as agents of educational change and on the conjectured future change in the field of language instruction. Additional comments on the fourth volume of the ACTFL-sponsored annual review of language instruction, "Foreign Language Education: A Reappraisal" (National Textbook Company, 1972), concentrate on three concepts: (1) education as a process, (2) pluralism and communication, and (3) professional concerns. The author argues that the success of future programs is dependent upon the constructive measures taken by the profession today. (RL)

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"Foreign Language Education: Projections for the Future"*

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I would like to pull together some of the major points discussed in the fourth volume of the Annual Review,[1] and then discuss where we think the foreign language profession should head in the near future.

Two major points of view appear across all chapters of the Review. The first involves the agents of change, namely, teachers, students, administrators, and the community. The second deals with the major movements of change within foreign language teaching and learning, which can be expected to grow in importance in the future.

Let's look first at the agents. Teachers are viewed as becoming more and more the facilitators of learning, and less and less the figures of authority and omniscience they are often portrayed to be in American folk culture. Their professional stature as integral and visible members in the administration of foreign language programs is seen as improving. Since they are closest to both students and school administrators, classroom teachers offer valuable assistance in improving the quality and direction of language instruction.

In the past students were viewed less as agents and more as objects acted upon. They were the "products" of a "diploma mill," processed in twelve years of carefully mapped-out assembly-line-type courses and programs. Those of you who heard Eric Sevareid's editorial Wednesday night[2] can appreciate the folly of mass inefficiency and indifference in dealing with individual students.

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*Speech given at the Sixth Annual Meeting of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, held jointly with the Southern Conference on Language Teaching in Atlanta, Georgia, November 25, 1972.

[1]Lange, Dale L., and Charles J. James, eds. Foreign Language Education: A Reappraisal. Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1972.

[2]On the "CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite," November 22, 1972.

As Mr. Sevareid pointed out, students are even willing to take schools to court for education which overlooks, if not ignores outright, the talents and deficiencies of the individual student. While we may not be slapped with mammouth litigations from dissatisfied students in the future, it is all too obvious to the authors of this year's Review that the student will be heard from more often and more openly. Students are genuine agents in education, with opinions, skills, and motivations to contribute to the teaching-learning environment. The more we listen honestly to them and the less we dictate to them, literally and figuratively, the better off we will be as language teachers.

Administrators play an important role in foreign language education also. They are those professionals who are not directly in the classroom but through whom the structure of education is maintained and changed. This includes supervisors, principals, and audiovisual consultants. The group can also be stretched to include textbook and materials producers. With the possible exception of the last group, most chapter authors do not see the roles of administrators as changing drastically at the moment. However, they all see administrators as giving up part of their authority and autonomy in order to admit teachers and students into the decision-making process.

As for publishers and other producers of classroom materials, they will play a more visible role in changing foreign language programs in the future. Gladys Lipton, for example, urges publishers to be willing to "go out on a limb" in cooperating with teachers in the production of worthwhile materials for classroom use, without heavy-handed concern for the market value of such materials. Charles Richardson echoes the same view for the production of commercial audiovisual materials. Jerald Green sees the publication of text materials which have a limited audience, but which reflect the needs of specific learning styles and

Individualization without technical assistance, in a large and expanding student population, and in today's world, leads to a weakening of the abilities of teachers and administrators to deal adequately with the needs of learners. In short, the three movements are actually aspects of the same complex situation, namely, how to discover and organize experiences for the efficient learning of language skills and cultural realities for students.

Now for the tough part. In trying to determine which items had been overlooked in putting together the Annual Review, the decision was made to limit the chapter[4] to the themes of 1) education as process, 2) pluralism and communication, and 3) professional concerns. These are by no means the most exhaustive topics we could choose, but they seem to be the most important on the basis of the Review. Let's look at each of these three topics for a moment.

Although education is most often thought of as an organizational system, such as a curriculum or course or administrative system, it is basically a process, that is, a series of interrelated decisions about the acquisition of skills and factual knowledge for the production of concepts, opinions, and actions. Each person individualizes this process in unique ways, even though there may be sufficient overlap from one person to another to permit generalizations about learning types. What is needed for the future is to find the most efficient working relationship between individual learning processes and generalizable learning styles.

All agents, teachers, students, administrators, and publishers need to be integrated into the process of education. In the future we can expect to see more decisions made by all members of a learning group, not just the principals, budget coordinators, and schedule makers. The flow of data about learning styles and activities might be from student to teacher to administrator, or from students and teachers to administrators, as well as from administrators to students and

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[4]Refers to Chapter 13, the final and summary chapter.

teachers. In other words, the flow of communication will be an open, two-way channel.

In the future each student may have a "file" either on paper or on computer cards or in some other form, stating the kinds of educational activities he or she has participated in, and the kinds of things he or she would like to pursue further. This will be examined and updated by the student with a teacher or counselor to determine further learning activities. Learners with similar backgrounds and personal profiles would then be put together into specific learning situations, whether in a formal classroom or in some other appropriate location. In other words, the traditional school building and four-walled classroom need not be the only site where successful learning and teaching takes place. After the group has completed its tasks, it might be disbanded and regrouped for other tasks. Students need not be all together for a whole semester or year, for learning to take place.

What may be waiting for us in the future is, of course, the dissolution of grades and grade levels as we currently understand them in American culture. After all, what defines "Level One Spanish" other than the fact that it comes before "Level Two"? What is "Third Year Russian" except for the content of a specific syllabus? What is "Minimal" proficiency in the German language? One answer these questions all share is that someone, somewhere, for hopefully benevolent reasons, has dictated, often "ad hoc," what these mean. As the various agents in our schools begin to examine carefully their assumptions and presumptions about the educational process, some of the more random aspects of language learning will be discarded, and more conscious efforts will be put into language programs.

As mentioned earlier, a wider recognition of pluralism in American society is currently active. Yet pluralism can be interpreted in ways not exclusively

related to other languages and cultures in a predominantly English-speaking society. It also refers to the multiciplicity of interest and ability groups among learners. The focus of this concern is the fact that language is basically communication. Language skills are meaningful only in terms of their ability to communicate facts, ideas, and feelings from one human being to another. Although this applies to written forms of communication, it is most important in oral communication and in the area of social interaction which oral language supports.

In a recent article Frank Grittner said that we must not accept the "limitations of the Skinnerian rat box and behaviorist pigeon cage as the realms within which human activity must contain itself."[5] Putting this into a positive context, it would be better to put human activity into the "sand box" of verbal interaction instead of simply verbal production, allowing students as much time and opportunity to talk with one another in the foreign language about things which interest them, and in which they can see some accomplishment. Let's use television and radio more to help us communicate directly with native speakers of target languages, in their own culture. Let's increase opportunities for travel abroad by language students at all socio-economic levels, not just those students who are lucky enough to afford it. We have the technology and the financial resources, but the foreign language profession must learn how to go after them.

The foreign language teaching profession is currently being severely challenged. While various groups within the profession are grumbling jealously about limited issues, the job market is shrinking and the demand for classroom teachers of foreign languages is diminishing. What is needed in the immediate future is more cooperation among all groups of the profession in planning the direction of

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[5] "Behavioral Objectives, Skinnerian Rats, and Trojan Horses." Foreign Language Annals 6(1972):52-60.

foreign language learning. One positive suggestion would be for the various AAT groups, ACTFL, and the National Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations to work together in terms of program planning, joint conventions, language sessions, pre-conference workshops, and the like. Many groups already meet simultaneously and in the same city, but with little real coordination of effort, even in terms of scheduling events.

On a larger scale, it seems that the profession should respond to the needs of teachers facing daily teaching problems in a more practical fashion other than by geographically rotating the annual meeting. The resources of the national meeting, convening perhaps every other year, could be diverted to regional meetings, state meetings, and even local workshops. In this way the resources of the profession will relate directly to its constituents.

One area of particular concern is the certification of foreign language teachers. Some of the AAT groups are considering a forum on teacher certification, especially with regard to language proficiency. If this is a matter of concern to one language group, then it is obviously a concern of all language groups. It is therefore clear that professional organizations will become more and more involved in teacher certification, both in terms of preservice and inservice preparation.

Albert Shanker, in a recent interview,[6] said that if we in America trained doctors the way we train teachers, there would be general public uproar for change. No doctor walks out of medical school with only four years of professional training and no on-the-job supervision. Yet we train teachers that way. At least a full "professional year" with carefully supervised teaching experience, would prove superior to a single quarter or semester of student teaching. In many ways the teaching profession is just as crucial to our social well-being

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[6] Interviewed by WCCO-TV(Minneapolis/St. Paul) at the AFT Convention in Minneapolis, October, 1972.

as the medical profession is to our physical well-being. But in order to bring about the kind of changes we need in order to vitalize the foreign language profession, all language groups at all levels will have to work together.

We at this convention have the power to determine the future future of foreign language education in this country. We have at this very moment the technology of computers and world communication, as well as the resources of libraries and publishing houses, to supply whatever information, ideas, opinions, and materials we need. We only have to convince ourselves that what we want in the future for the profession is under our control now. We must determine what kinds of teachers we want with what kinds of proficiencies and training. We must determine which language programs we wish to improve upon and which we wish to discard. We must not leave these decisions to chance. Nor must we leave it solely to other professional educators and administrators, especially those in control of budgets, who may have no qualms about cutting out programs which nobody is buying. By dealing honestly and thoughtfully within our profession we will not only guarantee ourselves the support of administrators and of students, but will also guarantee ourselves jobs, ten years from now.